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ABSTRACT

This paper presents two cases of educational renewal to exemplify the major role that individuals and political circumstances play in the determination of educational policies and their realization. One case concerns the impact of a new matriculation policy on curricular directions in Israel. The second case concerns the development of a 5-year plan for educational renewal in the Arab sector in Israel. The article probes the conflicts and dilemmas accompanying educational reform movements emphasizing the power of individuals--such as Ministers of Education--political groups, or economic factors to shape, lead, or distort the nature of educational policies. The study focuses on the dilemmas and conflicts accompanying educational reform in a multiethnic and multicultural country like Israel. The report portrays how a reformer, such as the Minister of Education, who started the process of matriculation reform in response to societal problems and influence, must face numerous struggles with the conservative establishment of teacher unions and universities. Reform can be successful as long as the "policy window" remains open and public mood is in favor of the intended changes. Results show that although reform can be delayed, popular forces in favor of reform can ensure its implementation. (RJM)

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Educational Reform: The Power of Individuals and Other Forces

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Paper was presented at the AERA meeting, Montreal, Canda. April 1999

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One of the main vehicles of educational reform is the development of curriculum materials.

Background

Analysis of the changes in curriculum development processes in Israel yields three main phases with some blurring of dividing lines. According to Ben-Peretz and Zajdman (1986), one may speak about three curriculum generations: a) traditional b) scientific c) humanistic. In Englund's (1990) terms these are expressions of different orientations: a) formal-patriarchal; b) scientific-rational and c) democratic. The first formal-patriarchal generation – until the beginning of the 60's was characterized by centralized decision-making concerning curriculum content without consideration of student or teacher diversity. The curriculum was discipline-oriented and focused on transmission of knowledge, very much in the European tradition. Curriculum materials, such as text-books and worksheets, were authorized by individual experts, master-teachers or superintendents.

The second, scientific-rational generation, from the early 60's until the middle 80's, reflected the influence of the American mode of curriculum development according to Tyler, Bloom and later on Schwab. In 1966 the Ministry of Education founded a department of curriculum development which was

divided into subject matter domains. Development of syllabi in these areas, and even the publication of text books, instructional materials, and tests, were in the hands of centrally situated curriculum committees aided by subject matter specialists. Master teachers were asked to participate in these committees, as writers and as implementers of trial editions. Following the Israel school reform in 1968, which led to the establishment of Junior High Schools and to a change from a 8 + 4 organization of schooling into a 6 + 3 + 3 format, the construction and production of curriculum was expedited because the new school structure needed a special new curricula. In 1978 all syllabi for the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade were completed, and until 1980 the Ministry curriculum department finished preparing syllabi for elementary schools and for many subject areas in high schools. In these curricula an attempt was made to consider varied needs of diverse student populations. All syllabi were obligatory as part of the centralized educational system in Israel. Some of the curriculum development projects were handled by university-based teams, but even there all major decisions regarding choice of content, sequence, and scope, had to be approved by the Ministry. Eden, who was director of the curriculum department in the Ministry summarizes the experience of ten years of curriculum development by stating that teachers' autonomy and knowledge tended to be overlooked in the process of development. Subject matter specialists played a major role in the curriculum enterprise, this led to unrealistic expectations and to major difficulties in curriculum implementation. This situation led to the third phase in curriculum development.

The third, democratic, participatory, generation, emphasized teacher and school autonomy in the context of the centralized system. Attention was given to the school context, the needs of learners, parents, and communities, and school-based localistic curricula started to flourish. Teachers are now empowered as curricular decision-makers and the concept of "curriculum potential" (Ben-Peretz 1990) the flexible, teacher-determined, use of curriculum materials, is conceived as liberating teachers from the demands of externally constructed curriculum materials. All this happened in the existing centralized educational system with obligatory central syllabi and Ministry devised matriculation exams. This conflict situation is expressed by Silberstein (1987) as follows: "In the Israel reality contradictory centralist tendencies seem to be competing with forces pushing for more freedom and autonomy for local groups in order to safeguard national social unity." (p. 9).

Is it possible to "safeguard national social unity" in a multicultural country like Israel, with its diverse ethnic groups, searching for, and demanding political autonomy and separate, yet equal, educational opportunities?

Separate educational systems in Israel are partly a heritage from the time of the British Mandate which established the principle of discrete social services for the different communities in the country. After the foundation of the State of Israel the separation persisted because it corresponded with the wish of Arabs to run their own schools, funded by the State, thus securing and conserving their national and cultural identity, though there are Arab parents who send their children to Jewish schools. In the Jewish sector one finds as

well two separate systems, the general public schools and the religious public schools. There are also private schools, both in the Arab and Jewish sectors.

Ethnic and cultural heterogeneity versus social integration

The first and second periods of curriculum development in Israel supported the notions of unification, social integration and might be understood to reflect the melting-pot ideology. Moreover, the common curriculum was considered to be the best avenue to ensure equal opportunities for all students. Still, from the beginning the educational establishment in Israel recognized the needs and priorities of a highly diverse society, in which Jews, Arabs, Druzes and other ethnic and religious groups live side by side. Because of this awarenerss different sectors of society incorporate their own components into the national curriculum, like religious studies or even develop their own curriculum, like the religious schools.

Beyond these diversifications of the national curriculum there occurred a change in the basic orientation toward the role of education in society. No longer were schools viewed as agents of an unification process leading to social conformity. The emerging voices of different groups, such as Moroccan Jews, caused an ideological shift, which echoed the shift toward multiculturalism in other countries. Slowly, but with ever increasing force, the Israeli curriculum started to reflect the extreme heterogeneity of the Israeli population. The curriculum in history, or literature, became varied and reflected the cultural richness of different societal groups, be they Beduins, Druze or Yemenite Jews. Schools introduced learning activities which

celebrated diversity, such as tracing one's family background and sharing it with one's classmates (Ben-Peretz 1986).

Two cases of educational renewal will be presented exemplifying the major role individuals and political circumstances play, in the determination of educational policies and their realization. One case concerns the impact of a new matriculation policy on curricular directions in Israel. Kingdom's (1984) scheme for analyzing the political context of reform and the concept of "policy window" serve as a framework of analyzing the major events in this case. The second case concerns the development of a five year plan for educational renewal in the Arab sector in Israel. Analysis of this case is based on Cohen's (1995) approach to systemic reform and on Lowham's (1995) analysis of the evolution of intentions of state policies.

These two cases will lead to a discussion of conflicts and dilemmas accompanying educational reform movements emphasizing the power of individuals, such as Ministers of Education, or of political groups, as well as economic factors, to shape, lead, or distort, the nature of educational policies.

A new matriculation policy

A matriculation certificate is required in Israel in order to continue one's education in institutes of higher education. Because of this requirement matriculation exams in Israel are high-stake exams creating stress and conflict situations. In 1993 a committee was appointed by the Minister of Education to consider a reform in the matriculation policy.

The committee members represent different stakeholders and interest group concerning matriculation reform. The appointment of the committee was an expression of an open "policy window" (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon defined policy window as pertaining to three streams. The "problem stream" constitutes a set of conditions that are conceived as necessitating remedial actions. The "alternative stream" is a set of proposals for actions that meet certain criteria, such as technical feasibility, value acceptability and reasonable chance for acceptance by officials and public. The third, "political stream" is composed of public mood, pressure groups, and ideological views. In the case of the reform of matriculation exams in Israel, all three "streams" linked up to open a policy window. Time was ripe for a reform in matriculation policies. The "problem situation, (stream)", was defined in social and pedagogical terms. From a social point of view it was considered unacceptable that only about 40% of a cohort finishing senior high schools in Israel were entitled to a matriculation certificate, though 71% of a cohort finish 12 grades. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that there exist significant gaps between different ethnic groups and socio-economic classes concerning percentages of graduates with matriculation certificates.

From a pedagogical point of view the large amount of time devoted in the last years of senior high schools to preparation for external examinations was considered to deny students opportunities for meaningul and in-depth studies related to their own interests.

The "alternative stream" consisted of a change in school organization policy in Israel favoring decentralization, more school autonomy and school based curriculum development. This change constituted a basis for viable alternatives for external examinations, such as a reduction in their number, and a shift towards on-going school assessment using a variety of assessment modes.

The "political stream" was expressed in a political climate that was conducive to change. The incoming labor government was interested in promoting education, addressing issues of equity, and the needs of diverse societal sectors. The new Minister of Education pushed toward a reform in matriculation exams, and in higher education, in order to increase the percentage of high school graduates among underrepresented societal groups entering tertiary education. Thus, the scene was set for policy reform.

The opening of a policy window for policy reform did not mean that the process of policy formulation proceeded without contradictory cultural and political dynamics. During the one and a half years of the committee's work contradictory voices were heard and considered in the committee, as well as outside it. Teachers' unions, on one hand, and university representatives, on the other hand, were opposed to any change in the existing matriculation policy. Both these organizations carried enormous weight and exercised their power in manifold ways, including the use of media such as newspaper reports, to present their positions.

The main arguments of the representatives of the teacher unions were as follows:

- Reduction in the number of external examinations and their limitation to the main languages: mother tongue, english and math, would create two classes of teachers: those whose subject natter areas are more central and vital to students, and those whose subject matter areas don't count, and might be partially *(Miriam – partly?)* eliminated from the school time-table.
- Teachers were accustomed to the fact that external examinations provided a strong motivation for students to study and to cooperate in the teaching-learning situation. They were afraid to lose this support in their daily struggle to induce learning.
- Students of lower ability and motivation would loose the opportunity to balance their final grades in one area by their success in other subject matter areas.

The university representatives, on the other hand, voiced their concern that without external exams in a variety of subjects they would lack a valid, reliable, and equal basis for screening students who wish to enter higher education.

Other members in the committee, who represented minorities, as well as religious and vocational schools, demanded consideration of their respective populations and needs. Moslem members, as well as representatives of Jewish religious schools, insisted that their respective subject areas should be

included in the external exams. The syllabus of vocational school includes theoretical and practical subjects, leading to arguments for requiring external exams in both domains.

Some members of the commitee, especially educational scholars advocated the complete abolishment of matriculation exams, which they perceived to be counterproductive for meaningful learning experiences.

Several inherent dilemmas were identified in the deliberations of the committee:

- the dilemma between the inention to give all students a common core of shared cultural knowledge, and the aspitration to serve the heterogeneity of diverse student populations
- the dilemma between the perceived personal and societal needs to promote excellence and the commitment to principles of equity, education for all, and social integration
- the dilemma between the inclination to adapt a policy which will ensure school autonomy and the Israeli tradition of a centralized educational system
- the dilenna between a demand for teacher and school accountability and the conception of open school goals which are not pre-determined by the authorities.

At one point it seemed that there was no way to reach a consensus on recommendations concerning the matriculation reform.

Finally consensus was reached, with one dissenting voice, and a new matriculation policy was formulated. The new assessment policy is an expression of an ideological and practical compromise. The overall number of subjects to be included in the matriculation certificate was not reduced, but part of the assessment was transferred to the control of schools. The number and nature of subject areas were adapted to specific student populations and school systems (minorities, religious, vocational).

The ideological compromise could come about when the advocates of complete abolishment of external exams came to see the point of teachers who were afraid to teach withou the support of the extrinsic motivation to learn imposed by exams. The representatives of teachers, on the other hand, became sensitive to the arguments for reducing the time spent on preparation for exams, as well as the accompanying stress. Representatives of the universities acknowledged the needs of students and the desire of schools to become autonomous, and agreed to transfer part of summative evaluation of students to their schools. The practical compromise was that though the overall number of assessed subject do not change, conditions of testing would be changed so that overtime assessment would become school-based, starting with three out of seven obligatory subjects.

An important aspect of the new policy was the modular format of exams. Before the reform students could choose the level of their studies in the diverse subject areas. Once they had chosen, or been advised by their

teachers to choose a basic level, and wished to move to a higher level later on, they had to start the examinations all over again at the new level. The reform changed this pattern, three levels of studies were to be determined in each subject, basic, regular and advanced. Students who passed exams at one level would be able to move to higher levels by adding certain components to the curriculum and by passing an additional exams on these components. The goal of this change is to enable weaker students to gain knowledge and confidence in their abilities thus increasing the percentage of students who are eligible for a matriculation certificate and for higher education. Once the new matriculation policy was approved by the Minister of Education, and by all relevant authorities, there arose the problem of implementation.

Implementation strategies

Two main modes of implementation of the reform were adopted, complementing each other. The first might be called the revolutionary mode, based on the authority and power of the Minister of Education in a centralized school system. After receiving the recommendations of the committee, and adopting them officially, the Minister decided that no external exams would be held in three subject areas to be identified each year through a lottery. In these subjects the students' grades are to be school-based. Thus, in one stroke the burden of external exams was lifted somewhat without creating a status difference between the various subjects. The lottery was ascheduled to take poace toward the end of the last year of high svhool. It determines which subjects are to be exempt of external exams. In these subjects school-based

grades are noted on the matriculation certificate. Up to the time of the lottery students study all subjects, and none is neglected or downgraded.

The second mode might be called the evolutionary mode of implementation. This is a slow process of working with, and in schools, searching for ways to improve school-based assessment. Simultaneously new curricula have to be developed which match the modular nature of testing. Ongoing consultations with university leaders, with educators and parents are needed in order to ensure the continuation of this process and to appease any opponents. The evolutionary mode of implementing the new matriculation policy in Israel is in the form of an intervention project in twenty two high schools. These high schools were carefully selected so as to represent different regions in the country, different segmetns of society, different ethnic and religious groups, and different school systems – academic and vocational. In each school, one to three subjects were chosen for school-based development and assessment.

Collaborative teacher teams were set up for every subject and special in-service programs were initiated. The teachers learned to use divergent modes of student assessment, and students became more involved in their learning process. The twenty two schools project will be carried on for several years, new schools will join the project from time to time, and serve as models for an anticipated system-wide implementation of the matriculation reform policy. It has to be borne in mind, though, that the actual interpretation of the new policy, will vary in different schools according to the specific context and

situation, and will reflect an evolution of intentions and different emphasis on the various components of the new policy.

But then, everything changed. After the elections a new Minister of Education was appointed and he did not believe in the matriculation reform. Being a very orthodox he could not sanction a situation in which Bible studies were not an obligatory subject for external examinations. The "policy window" was closing, as the religious, conservative parties demanded a withdrawal from the reform. Newly appointed senior officials in the Ministry were happy to oblige and one year after the political shift the number of external examinations was restored and the "lottery" abolished. The only remnant of the matriculation reform was the twenty two high school project. These schools continued to be involved in alternative modes of student assessment and in school based curriculum development and examinations. Another two years passed, and a new minister of Education took over. Slowly and without mentioning the former policy, some of its main recommendations surfaced again, such as the modular format of the examinations. On one hand, this "bandwagoning" of educational reform seems to highlight the central and crucial role played by individuals, and political parties, in positions of power. On the other hand, it is important to remember the origin of the matriculation reform in social and pedagogical problems associated with the existing situation. These problems did not vanish with election outcomes. Moreover, the brief period of courageous attempts to introduce radical changes in an unsatisfactory state of affairs, left its mark on the system, so that with some slight encouragement the matriculation reform seems to get another chance. It is too soon to

determine the outcomes of this reawakening, but it demonstrates the complexity of interactions and power relations between individuals and societal forces inherent in any effort to introduce changes into an educational system.

A new five-year education plan for the Arab sector

In the summer of 1987 the late Minister of Education, Mr. Hammer appointed a committee to develop a new five-year education plan for the Arab Sector in Israel. This plan was to follow a previous five-year plan which was developed in 1991 and partially *(Miriam – partly?)* implemented. There remained a gap between the resources serving the Jewish sector and those of the Arab sector and an ensuing gap between the achievement level in these sectors. The main areas in need of further development and affirmative action were: special education, science and technology education. Educational support services and building of additional schools and classrooms. The commiteee members represented different stakeholders and interest groups, among them mayors of three cities and directors of education departments, Arab educators and scholars, and heads of relevant departments in the Ministry of Education. The general public was invited to send their suggestions to the committee, the Minister of Education and several political figures and the Arab community took an active part in the deliberations.

During the time the committee devoted to its task the Supreme Court of Israel dealt with a judicial claim submitted by Arab leaders concerning the existing gap between the educational support system in the Jewish and Arab sectors

and ruled for the claiming party. The work of the committee raised great interest and hope in the Arab community. The committee was assisted by Ministry officials, and conducted in-depth deliberations concerning the state of Arab education in various domains, the most pressing needs and the steps to be taken in order to improve the present situation. The committee reached a consensus about the necessary recommendations and submitted the five-year plan to the Minister of Education who was appointed after Mr. Hammer. The main points in these recommendations concerned the allocation of resources to the building of about 300 new classrooms each year, and the establishment of centers for guiding the mainstreaming of special education. Emphasis was put on the expansion of human resources and educational support programs. Specific cultural demands in the area of curriculum development were acknowledged. The plan was endorsed by the Minister and was presented to the Education Committee of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) which approved it.

Financial resources necessary for implementing the plan were promised. Then, again the process stopped. The budget for the following year did not include the special allocation necessary to realize the plan. Lowham (1995) argues that without a pre-planned implementation continuum which commences with policy development and ends with practice, reform endeavours are bound to fail. Educational intentions evolve over time and proceed on a path composed of a number of sub-systems, which might re-inforce each other, creating a synergetic situation in which a number of factors collectively yield cumulative results (Ben-Peretz 1995).

Conversely, lack of cohesion between these sub-systems, in this case the Ministry of Education and the Finance Ministry, might prove to be counterproductive leading to lack of policy implementation, to disappointment and frustration of those involved (Cohen 1995). This is the case of the five-year plan for the Arab sector in Israel.

Still, the story of the five-year plan for the Arab sector in Israel has not yet been concluded. Political forces are going to intervene and will try to use all possible avenues of a democratic society, including the media, to bring about the implementation of this plan. Ministers exert their power but alongside there exist strong political forces, and sub-systems which which determine the outcomes of educational policy making.

Changing balance between the power of individuals and other forces

At the beginning of this paper questions were raised concerning the dilemmas and conflicts accompanying educational reform movements in a multiethnic and multicultural countrry like Israel, and the significant roles played by individuals, as well as by political power groups in the process of developing and implementing reform policies.

The two cases described briefly above reflect these dilemmas and portray the changing balance of power between individuals on one hand and forces in society, on other hand. Sometimes the individuals are reformers, like the Minister of Education who started the process of matriculation reform in

response to acute societal problems and pressure groups strugling against the conservative establishment of teacher unions and universities. Reform continues to be successful as long as the "policy window" remains open, and the "political stream", public mood and pressure groups are in favour of the intended changes and intentions evolve in a cohesive and synergetic manner. But changes and situations are reversible. A new Minister with a different personal agenda might be able to overturn and undo central features of the reform, relying on a different set of pressure groups and a public mood which views the radical changes with apprehension.

The pendulum swings in another directon, and the reform regresses. As stated above this relapse cannot eliminate those societal factors that were at the root of the whole process, so that we see now how the pendulum starts to move back, and another reform wave is returning.

The five-year education plan for the Arab sector is at the point of gathering momentum, the balance of power leaning towards those political forces in Israeli Jewish and Arab society that favour far-reaching reform. Whatever the inclinations of the Ministers of Education and Finance, the plan will be at least partially *(Miriam – partly?)* implemented, not least because of the synergetic effect of the judgement of the Supreme Court.

The road of reform movements is rough and uneven but bears promise and hope that overtime, and with the right exercise of political power, it will lead to significant improvement. We are continuously striving for Utopia. Oscar Wilde

put it so well: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopia." (Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*)

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